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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to aid in the process of finding vocabulary instruction that would lead to more effective comprehension. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference in the comprehension of the two samples of students when one sample was taught the vocabulary of the entire selection while the other was taught the vocabulary of the specific passage. The control sample was comprised of five perceptually impaired students and the experimental sample was comprised of six perceptually impaired students. The control sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words for each reading selection for a period of 30 days. The experimental sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words for their immediate reading passage for a period of 30 days. Results showed no significant difference between the two methods of instruction. The control group did perform slightly better than the experimental group, indicating that perceptually impaired children may benefit from a comprehensive view of the vocabulary for the entire reading selection. (Two tables of data are included and 36 references are attached.) (MG)

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Vocabulary Development in the Middle School Years

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to aid in the process of finding vocabulary instruction that would lead to more effective comprehension.

Two samples were formed. The control sample was comprised of five perceptually impaired students, while the experimental sample was comprised of six perceptually impaired students. The control sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words for each reading selection for a period of thirty days. The experimental sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words needed for their immediate reading passage, not the entire selection, for a period of thirty days. Results showed no significant difference between the two methods of instruction. The control sample did perform slightly better.

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Introduction

The importance of vocabulary development for effective reading has been recognized for years. Davis (1972) found that vocabulary development was among one of the four basic procedures used to help children learn to comprehend. Snider (1989) found that instructing thirteen learning disabled junior high students in the necessary prior knowledge (information and vocabulary concepts) led to superior reading comprehension knowledge. Mazynski (Marzano, 1984) found that the overall goal of vocabulary instruction should be to increase the number of words that a student can recognize automatically, through systematic, long-term instruction.

Knowing that vocabulary has always been an important factor in comprehension, it is important to review the general literature on how vocabulary has been taught. Nagy (1985) suggested, based on a study with eighth grade students, that incidental learning from context accounts for a substantial proportion of the vocabulary growth that occurred during the school years. Blachowicz' (1985) surveys of commercial reading programs, suggested that reading materials offer little beyond perfunctory pre-reading of unusual vocabulary.

Research, related to this, were studies focusing on how vocabulary can effectively be taught. Duttlemeyer (1985) suggests that developing a close relationship between vocabulary and reading is one of the major responsibilities of the teacher in the classroom. Pikulski (1989) focused instruction on

vocabulary that represents ideas or concepts that are central to the selection and teach that vocabulary thoroughly. Tyrell (1983) discussed factors that are necessary for reading comprehension. First, teachers must choose a textbook with readability and concept levels appropriate for their students. However, the teacher's role extends beyond that of text selection; he or she must bring the student to an understanding of the concepts located within the textbook. This can be done by teaching students important vocabulary terms, relating the material to the student's experience, guiding reading to provide support, and providing reading experiences to reinforce the concepts. Luparelli (1982) describes a functional reading program in graphic arts classes at a Massachusetts middle school. Teachers associate their text material with specific content-related reading skills in comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, using a three level reading guide and vocabulary development exercises. Margosein (1982) did a study where 14 junior high students were assigned to two vocabulary instruction treatments. One treatment used context-rich, three sentence passages as sources for target word definition. The other, the semantic mapping treatment, entailed learning new words by identifying similarities and differences with related, known words. Results favored the semantic mapping treatment. These findings suggest that focus on word features in related, known words may be an effective method for teaching new vocabulary.

The need for meaningful vocabulary instruction has been clearly documented. Researchers have begun to look at the various ways by which unknown words can be taught to students. It is necessary to continue to search for the most effective ways to teach vocabulary to further improve student comprehension.

Hypothesis

To aid in this process of finding effective procedures, the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference in the comprehension of the two samples when one sample was taught the vocabulary of the entire selection while the other was taught the vocabulary of the specific passage.

Procedures

Two samples were formed. The control sample was comprised of five perceptually impaired students, while the experimental sample was comprised of six perceptually impaired students. The control sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words for each reading selection for a period of thirty days. The experimental sample was instructed in all the vocabulary words needed for their immediate reading passage, not the entire selection for a period of thirty days. The instruction of each of the vocabulary words chosen was the same for each sample. The word was said to the students, the word was put into a sentence,

the word was defined, and then the students copied the word and its definition into their notebook. Upon the completion of each reading passage, the students completed in writing questions taken from their readers to evaluate their comprehension. Correct responses were totaled and compared using tests of t. A total possible correct answer over the period of the study was 77.

Results

As can be seen in table one,

Table 1

Results of Students' Responses to Comprehension Questions

	Mean	*Standard Deviation*	*Tests of t*
Control Number = 5	87.78	3.26	1.08
Experimental Number = 6	83.65	7.96	

there was a difference between the means of 4.13 points between the samples on correct comprehension questions, but this difference was not statistically significant. The control sample, which was instructed in all of the vocabulary for the entire reading passage, performed slightly better than the experimental sample which received instruction on the vocabulary for the immediate reading passage. It is of interest, too, that the dispersion of correct responses is narrower for the control sample.

Conclusions and Implications

The results apparently indicate that perceptually impaired children benefitted from a comprehensive view of the vocabulary for the entire reading selection. Conversely, it might appear that segmenting vocabulary instruction for instruction into specific reading passages may have impeded the experimental samples' comprehension of the passages since the difference between the sample means was not significant. It seems more likely that the former conclusion is correct when the relatively small amount of dispersion around the mean is noted in comparison with the larger standard deviation of the experimental sample.

The above results permit acceptance of the hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the comprehension of the samples as a result of this type of differential treatment.

Further research to establish procedures that are more or less effective need to be done and could examine other ways of learning vocabulary and relating to the comprehension of a story.

Vocabulary Instruction: Related Research

Most people believe that vocabulary instruction is necessary for reading comprehension to successfully take place. Therefore, one may assume that vocabulary instruction has been well researched, effective teaching strategies have been developed, teachers have made instruction of vocabulary a priority, and producers of basals have effectively guided teachers in vocabulary instruction. After reviewing research on vocabulary development, many of these assumptions need to be questioned further.

According to Nolte (1937), vocabulary has been considered by numerous investigators as the most important structural element affecting comprehension in reading. The importance of word knowledge for comprehending prose has been repeatedly emphasized by various educators and researchers. (Becker, 1977). As Anderson and Freebody have stated (1981), vocabulary knowledge has been found to be strongly related to general verbal ability and reading comprehension.

According to Marzano (1984) since vocabulary is so strongly related to reading, it is important to determine how it can best be taught and reinforced within the classroom. Many researchers have begun to study how vocabulary can best be taught and reinforced. Wixson's (1986) research provided support for preteaching vocabulary as means of enhancing children's comprehension. The results of this investigation suggest that

preteaching non-central vocabulary is most likely to facilitate comprehension of non-central ideas.

Mason (1979) studied the effects of polysemous words on sentence comprehension. She found that when words are placed in contexts which support their most common meanings, subjects remember the words and are more accurate in selecting the meanings than when the contexts support the less common meanings. These findings suggest that there are at least three instructional aspects for word knowledge. One is learning the meaning of the word, Second is learning more than one meaning. Last is learning how to choose the contextually supported meaning.

Mayher (1983) looked at students' responses in vocabulary and comprehension based on classroom practices. He found that focusing on the acquisition of concepts rather than on the acquisition of isolated vocabulary emphasizes the more important concern. Furthermore, the teacher must identify the reasons for teaching particular concepts and plan concrete ways for connecting these concepts to students' individual lives.

Nolte (1937) studied the effects on comprehension if the vocabulary was simplified using the Ogden "basic" words. It was found that there were no significant differences between comprehension of selections read in the original form and those read with reduced vocabularies.

Kameenui (1982) did an experiment in which easy and familiar vocabulary words were substituted for harder ones. It was found that substituting easy vocabulary words for difficult vocabulary words in a contrived passage made the text significantly easier to comprehend, and that redundant information in a text significantly contributed to successful text comprehension except for retell scores.

Sampson's study (1982) examined the effectiveness of instructional cloze in improving reading comprehension, strengthening vocabulary and encouraging divergent production of third grade students. The treatment of the experimental group consisted of the substitution of a cloze instructional center for various reading centers during the fifteen week duration of the study. The experimental group did significantly better than the control group on both reading comprehension and divergent production. There was no significant differences between the two groups in vocabulary development.

Over a five year period, Pittleman (1985) reviewed research which focused on investigating the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching strategies, with particular emphasis on the two semantic-based instruction and strategies of semantic mapping and semantic feature analysis. A series of five studies on these strategies verified that these strategies are not only powerful tools for vocabulary development, but also good alternatives to the traditional instructional activities presented before

students read a new passage. This research also indicated that vocabulary instruction and emphasis are not high priorities with most classroom teachers.

Hansen (1986) studied the relative merits of individual and cooperative methods of vocabulary instruction in the seventh grade. The control group had individual instruction and the experimental group had paired instruction. Results show that while there was a substantial gain in vocabulary for both groups, the experimental group made a better gain. Among the factors for the paired groups' superior performance may have been their enthusiasm for the program, the challenge inherent in working with a partner, and the use of oral language and discussion during instruction.

Herman (1985) studied how text features influence the amount of vocabulary knowledge students acquired incidentally while reading expositions. Three sets of text features were identified: one, features associated with the macrostructure; second, features associated with logical and temporal relations in the microstructure; and third, features associated with explanations of concepts and relations among them. The results indicated that both able and less able readers who read text versions in which key concepts and the relations among them had been explained thoroughly learned significantly more word meanings than did students who read any of the other versions.

Mezynski (1983) reviewed eight vocabulary studies concluding that broad, systematic, long-term training in vocabulary, using an approach that relates new vocabulary items to logical clusters, enhances student word knowledge and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the results indicate that the overall goal of vocabulary instruction should be to increase the number of words that a student can recognize automatically through this systematic, long-term instruction.

Smith (1986) compared two instructional methods, drill and varied activities, that might be used to develop geographic vocabulary. The students chosen were from classes in urban, rural and transitional environments. The students were divided into three experimental groups. One received drill instruction, another received activity instruction, and a control group who received no instruction. All groups were given a pretest and a posttest consisting of outline maps of the United States and the world with numbered locations to be identified. Both methods of instruction were proven effective, but drill was apparently the better method.

Lloyd (1985) studied whether teaching content area vocabulary using hands-on experiences and teacher/student interaction would result in greater vocabulary knowledge and better comprehension of a related text than conventional dictionary work. The subjects for the study included forty-five fourth grade students from a Chapter 1 school in the American

Southwest. Each of three groups were taught or exposed to vocabulary words on the water cycle. The experimental group used the scientific method and teacher/student interaction. The traditional group was required to locate vocabulary words either in the glossary of the textbook or the dictionary. The control group received no treatment. Analysis indicated significant positive effects for treatment and reading ability. Findings also showed that the experimental group performed significantly better than either the traditional or control groups, whose performance was not significantly different.

Hollaway (1989) addressed problems experienced by learning disabled students in recalling specialized science and social studies vocabulary. Students appeared unfamiliar with memory strategies as a means to enhance vocabulary recall. The students were taught key terms using mnemonic strategies. Interviews with students showed heightened awareness of the relationship of mnemonic aids to improve recall.

Tolfra (1985) did a study with sixty-four learning disabled sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. The instructional groups were given the daily lessons on dinosaurs, including attributes, vocabulary and reasons for the extinction of dinosaurs The mnemonic groups were taught the information using keyword and pegword techniques. On the fourth day all students were given production and identification tests. Results indicated that mnemonic groups outperformed control groups on

both delayed tests as well as the attributes and vocabulary lesson.

McLoone (1986) studied the effects of two types of memory strategy instruction. The types were mnemonic or directed rehearsal. The study comprised sixty seventh and eighth grade learning disabled students. The results showed that subjects instructed in the mnemoni method significantly outperformed subjects instructed in the direct rehearsal strategy.

Malouf (1988) studied learning disabled sixth through eighth grade students receiving instruction involving matching negation prefixes to root words. The students used an instructional computer game or a computer program that operated identically but without game features. Results indicated that both programs produced equal gains in task skill, but the game produced higher levels of continuing motivation.

Alfano (1985) studied students' achievement in vocabulary development under two modes, teacher directed instruction and computer-assisted instruction. The study was done with 38 seventh graders who had a one to three year vocabulary deficit. The control group was given vocabulary instruction using the computer program. The experimental group was taught vocabulary with a computer printout. The computer corrected the control group's vocabulary, while the whole class corrected the experimental group's vocabulary. Results of this study showed no significant difference between the two methods. However, there

was a slight difference in favor of the experimental, teacher-directed group, indicating that computer-assisted instruction is an educational tool but not a replacement for teachers.

Katz (1978) did a study to investigate the effect of visual-verbal method versus a traditional dictionary method in teaching vocabulary development. The visual-verbal group illustrated their words by cutting out or drawing pictures to accompany them. The results indicated that there were no significant difference between the two methods. The findings suggest that a visual-verbal method could offer needed in depth understanding of words if it was used in conjunction with other vocabulary instruction methods.

Since teachers appear to rely heavily on basals, some researchers looked at how the basals approached the vocabulary area of instruction.

Kaiser (1989) compared the effectiveness of direct instruction and basal reading instruction in basic word attack and comprehension skills. It was found that student's acquisition of basic sight word vocabulary to be greater when taught by direct instruction than by basal instruction.

Stallman (1990) investigated new vocabulary of basal readers for second and fifth grade children. It was determined that on the average, children already knew more than seventy percent of the "new" words in basal readers one and two years beyond their grade level.

Marzano (1989) conducted a study to determine what the basic words in a list of words kindergarten through sixth grade students will frequently encounter in the reading. The words were selected from their textbooks, including basals. The major finding was that out of 7,230 high frequency words, 5,084 were found to be basic. The study of suffixes indicates that instruction in their use might be most effective if it focused on those that change basic words to noun forms.

Educators and researchers have often used results of research and their own thoughts to develop strategies of teaching topics like vocabulary. Dixon (1990) describes a technique for vocabulary instruction in which students complete a chart by providing two synonyms, an antonym and the pronunciation of a given word. Dixon reports that even though the chart is easy to complete, students begin to think critically and creatively.

Hourcade (1987) discusses what happened when parents of learning-disabled nine to eleven year odds used a teacher-made game for a home program. This program was designed to provide additional practice on reading vocabulary lists. A clear and positive relationship was found between the number of minutes spent playing the game and the number of words learned.

Partridge (1984) states that the use of rhymes in a reading program can result in improved listening skills, increased vocabulary, improved spelling, and proficiency in comprehension.

Stieglitz (1981) describes the Subject Area Vocabulary Reinforcement (SAVOR) procedure as an example of a strategy that teachers can easily use to reinforce and expand content area vocabulary and concepts. First, to teach the SAVOR method, the teacher chose a category highly familiar to the students that was not part of their content of study . The second stage applied the process to the subject matter. The final stage was to move the students towards independence. They began practicing the procedure on their own.

As Jenkins and Dixon (1983) indicate there are ample opportunities for research and development in the area of vocabulary instruction. As educators, we even need to continue asking many questions. For example, which strategies are more effective, how can basals more successfully guide vocabulary instruction, and how can we as educators make vocabulary a top priority.

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Appendix

Raw Scores

Experimental Sample	*Test 1*	*Test 2*	*Test 3*	*Total*
1	25	22	22	69
2	27	20	24	71
3	24	20	22	66
4	24	19	20	63
5	11	21	21.5	53.5
6	24	19	21	64

Control Sample	*Test 1*	*Test 2*	*Test 3*	*Total*
1	20	23	21	64
2	25	22	21	68
3	25	21	25	71
4	25	21	21	67
5	26	22	20	68